

RESEARCH

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# FROM OUTBREAK TO RECOVERY: AN OBSERVATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S ONLINE COMMUNICATION DURING AND POST-COVID-19

Del brote a la recuperación: un análisis observacional de la  
comunicación en línea del gobierno rumano durante y después de la  
COVID-19

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The expanding digital era has transformed government communication, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to comprehensively evaluate the digital communication strategies of the Romanian Government during the pandemic and its aftermath, emphasizing the importance of effective communication in times of crisis. **Methodology:** For this comprehensive analysis, quantitative and qualitative techniques were combined. Data were collected from Facebook using FanPageKarma.com and processed in

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RStudio. Key aspects were examined, including the categorization of communication phases, posting frequency, metrics of public interaction (comments and actions), and the analysis of the overall sentiment tone. **Results:** The findings reveal that during the COVID-19 crisis, the Romanian Government dedicated 42.3% of its 3,465 Facebook posts to the virus. This percentage significantly decreased to 1.46% after the crisis, indicating a thematic shift in government communication. Public engagement also decreased post-pandemic, with a shift towards global narratives, especially tension between Ukraine and Russia. The sentiment analysis shows an overwhelmingly positive language aimed at inspiring trust and hope. **Conclusions:** This study highlights that, following the COVID-19 crisis, the Romanian Government adapted its digital communication, experiencing lower public engagement but maintaining a positive tone. This underscores the importance of effective government communication during and after crises, a critical element for ensuring public trust and social cohesion. These findings offer valuable lessons for government communication management in times of uncertainty and emphasize the need for continuous adaptation in a constantly evolving digital world.

**Keywords:** Romanian government, online communication, crisis communication, sentiment analysis, COVID-19.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** La era digital en expansión ha transformado la comunicación gubernamental, especialmente durante crisis como la pandemia de COVID-19. Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar en profundidad las estrategias de comunicación digital del Gobierno Rumano durante la pandemia y sus secuelas, resaltando la importancia de una comunicación efectiva en tiempos de crisis. **Metodología:** Para este análisis exhaustivo, se combinaron técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas. Se recopilaron datos de Facebook a través de FanpageKarma.com y se procesaron en RStudio. Se examinaron aspectos clave, como la categorización de fases de comunicación, frecuencia de publicaciones, métricas de interacción pública (comentarios y acciones), y el análisis del tono del sentimiento general. **Resultados:** Los resultados revelan que durante la crisis de COVID-19, el Gobierno Rumano dedicó el 42.3% de sus 3,465 publicaciones de Facebook al virus. Este porcentaje disminuyó significativamente al 1.46% después de la crisis, indicando un cambio temático en la comunicación gubernamental. La participación pública también disminuyó post-pandemia, con un desplazamiento hacia narrativas globales, especialmente la tensión entre Ucrania y Rusia. El análisis de sentimiento muestra un lenguaje abrumadoramente positivo, destinado a inspirar confianza y esperanza. **Conclusiones:** Este estudio resalta que, después de la crisis de COVID-19, el Gobierno Rumano adaptó su comunicación digital, experimentando una menor participación pública pero manteniendo un tono positivo. Esto subraya la importancia de una comunicación gubernamental efectiva durante y después de las crisis, un elemento crucial para garantizar la confianza del público y la cohesión social. Estos hallazgos ofrecen valiosas lecciones para la gestión de la comunicación gubernamental en tiempos de incertidumbre y subrayan la necesidad de adaptación continua en un mundo digital en constante cambio.

**Palabras clave:** Gobierno rumano, comunicación en línea, comunicación de crisis, análisis de sentimiento, COVID-19.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the records of modern history, the COVID-19 pandemic has thoroughly tested the strength and adaptability of governments worldwide. While mainly a health crisis, the pandemic also presented various communication challenges, urging governmental bodies to re-examine and adjust their approaches. Drummond and Bozanta (2022) posited that the quality and mode of political communication significantly impacted public sentiment, highlighting the importance of strategic and empathetic communication during this tumultuous time.

Before delving into Romania's distinct narrative, it is pivotal to understand the overarching theoretical frameworks that guided such a transformation, most notably, the evolution of interaction through established social networks, the nuances of online institutional communication, and the principles of risk communication. These three dimensions are inextricably intertwined in the context of governmental communication during such global crises.

With the aggressive spread of the virus worldwide, governments have turned to digital channels, relying heavily on social media platforms to disseminate official updates. While these platforms were initially designed for personal communication, they quickly became critical channels for mandates, health advisories, and crisis directives. However, this transformation was not ubiquitous. Governments' digital strategies were shaped by their internal sociopolitical dynamics and technological frameworks. As a result, a spectrum of approaches emerged, with China embodying effectiveness through centralized governance and technological prowess, as analyzed by Wang (2022). Conversely, Awobamise et al. (2021) scrutiny of Uganda reveals the negative consequences of inconsistent online strategies.

Amidst the current global context, Romania's experience with the pandemic presents an intriguing picture. The nation is located at a juncture of various cultural influences, with a strong existing digital communication landscape prior to the outbreak. This landscape featured a high internet usage rate and a thriving social media user base, indicating potential for effective digital communication during the pandemic (Tasente, 2014).

Upon closer examination, Romania's digital narrative during this phase can be described as multidimensional. In accordance with established global standards, governmental and health institutions promptly implemented specialized channels to disseminate vital information. These efforts, conveyed in user-friendly formats and updated on a regular basis, served to enhance transparency, and instill a sense of confidence among the general population.

However, it becomes apparent that there are complexities and occasional discrepancies between the principles of online institutional communication and risk communication during this time (Gagu et al., 2021). Effective risk communication

during crises requires transparency, coherence, and empathy. The scientific community's evolving understanding of the novel virus resulted in a fluid situation, which presented challenges for consistent and transparent communication. At times, discrepancies in official viewpoints, unclear directives, and modified procedures hindered Romania's ability to communicate effectively in the digital realm. A more thorough comprehension of audience segmentation, with particular attention to demographic groups such as the elderly and those with limited digital proficiency, could have greatly expanded the effectiveness of communication.

Embedding Romania's narrative within our core theoretical frameworks reveals essential trends. The pandemic heightened the existing digital interaction trajectory and highlighted the significant distinction between mere online presence and genuinely impactful online engagement. The challenge was not solely to disseminate information but also to ensure that the conveyed message elicited valuable responses.

This period emphasizes the interdependent relationship between digital platforms and governmental entities. Platforms acknowledged their crucial societal role and implemented specialized features like COVID-19 sections, verification tools, and algorithms that endorse reliable sources.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic provided significant knowledge about digital political communication, without subjective evaluations. Romania's progress, with its accomplishments and lessons, reflects the global journey. As we move toward a post-pandemic era, the lessons gained during these times will undoubtedly shape future government communication paradigms. In the digital age, governmental communicative strategies will rely on principles of transparency, empathy, and purposeful engagement. These principles have been emphasized during the current crisis and will continue to serve as the foundation for effective communication.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The COVID-19 pandemic's sudden onset exposed the complexities and potentials of online government communication on a global scale. As countries contended with the virus's health effects, it became apparent that combatting misinformation and ensuring trust in governmental advice were both equally important.

In China, Sina Weibo was more than just a microblogging site; it became a reliable source of public health advisories. The Chinese government's precise management of information dissemination, documented by Wang (2022), highlighted the effectiveness of a centralized model. China's efficient containment strategies reflected the centralized system's capability to streamline messages and maintain consistency. The immediacy and responsiveness demonstrated in China exemplified effective governmental communication.

Li et al. (2022) offer insight into China's online communication strategy by analyzing its nuances. They find a distinct difference between the communications of local

administrative bodies and the central government. The former displays a preference for instructive communication, with emphasis on guidelines and directives. Meanwhile, the latter emphasizes advocacy, highlighting collective ethos and national solidarity. This distinction is crucial because it highlights the various levels of government communication and their inherent connection to risk communication. Amid the constantly changing landscape of a pandemic, where recommendations evolve based on expanding scientific knowledge, distinguishing between instructive language and persuasive messaging can significantly affect public adherence and confidence.

Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia pursued a distinctive communication approach. The Ministry of Health displayed a strong preference for Twitter, a platform widely recognized for its real-time information and public interaction. As noted by Azudin et al. (2023), this method allowed for a comprehensive outreach that catered to both local and international audiences, including the significant number of expatriates and pilgrims in the country. However, nuanced differences influenced by underlying sociopolitical structures exist beneath the apparent uniformity in strategies.

The digital landscape in Turkey, as analyzed by Aksak et al. (2023), highlights the importance of cohesive online strategies. Their observation on inconsistent hashtag usage uncovers a seemingly trivial yet crucial aspect of digital communication. Given the brevity of the digital space, markers like hashtags play a crucial role in categorizing, prioritizing, and boosting messages. Inconsistent use of markers can weaken the intended message, reducing both its visibility and impact.

While these analyses focus on the mechanics of digital communication, a greater concern arises - the potential politicization of health communication. Zhou et al. (2023) conducted a meaningful investigation of this issue, centering on the vaccination narrative in the United States. Their research revealed a divide between politicians and medical professionals, with politicians at times exploiting vaccination communication for political gain. These trends not only distort vital health communication but also amplify public skepticism.

Within the scope of trust, Syahputra et al. (2021) examine the digital strategies of the Indonesian government, which impart a cautionary tale. The government's use of "buzzers," essentially social media influencers, to reinforce official narratives has inadvertently led to discussions surrounding credibility and personal interests. Such undertakings have further imperilled trust, a sensitive concept during critical times. Croucher's et al. (2023) research on South American countries highlights the connection between trust and compliance. Their comparative analysis shows that countries with higher trust ratings in government communication had better public adherence to health advisories, regardless of the actual health situation.

Europe's endeavors in this field, particularly Spain's tactics, provided an opposing viewpoint. According to Castillo-Esparcia et al. (2020), Spain made a deliberate attempt to dominate the narrative of the pandemic on social media. Although this

organized strategy ensured coherence in their messaging, it also hindered the spontaneity and exchange of ideas that platforms like Twitter are inherently designed for. The comparison between Romania's and Spain's experiences highlights the diverse range of European responses and emphasizes the intricate interplay of history, culture, politics, and technology that shape communication strategies.

When examining multiple scholarly narratives, it becomes clear that distinct paradigms emerge. The pandemic's disruption demonstrated the importance of immediacy, trustworthiness, and malleability in government discourse. Similarly, the digital landscape provided an expansive channel for government outreach, yet introduced complex challenges regarding uniformity, authenticity, and the potential for political manipulation.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

The pandemic has caused significant changes that require an examination of the communication strategies utilized by the Romanian Government on popular platforms, particularly Facebook. This research seeks to analyse these strategies throughout the chaotic pandemic period, as well as during the subsequent post-pandemic phase.

The primary objective of this study is to comprehend and evaluate how the Romanian Government manages communication on Facebook during these unprecedented circumstances. Our investigation not only assesses the frequency of these communications but also scrutinizes the nature and content of the messages conveyed.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

A significant aspect of our research involves setting clear temporal boundaries. Our first task is to define the criteria for identifying the pandemic and post-pandemic periods for communication strategies. Identifying such distinctions is crucial for pinpointing any significant strategic changes or continuities between the two periods.

In addition, we will conduct a detailed analysis of the Romanian Government's Facebook communication frequency. Through a comparative analysis of the communication frequencies during and after the pandemic, we aim to gain insights into how governmental response and outreach strategies may have adapted to the crisis.

The public's interaction with these governmental posts is equally, if not more, instructive. Therefore, our study aims to examine the reactions, comments, and shares these posts produce. Such an analysis would offer insights on public sentiment, engagement levels, and even the effectiveness of the current communication strategy.

Moreover, we analyse the tone and direction of communication, looking beyond the quantitative metrics. By conducting in-depth research into sentiment indicators, we

gain an understanding of the emotional nuances and undertones of these messages during the two distinct periods.

We employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to gain these nuanced insights. The data was predominantly obtained through the social media analysis tool, FanPageKarma.com. The comprehensive extraction of Facebook posts by the Romanian Government from the start of 2020 until late 2022 was feasible due to the platform's capacity to monitor diverse social networks.

After obtaining this extensive dataset, a necessary step was taken to segment the data chronologically. A pre-COVID-19 phase was distinguished, spanning from March 11th, 2020, to March 7th, 2022, contrasted with a post-pandemic phase ranging from March 8th, 2022, to October 29th, 2022.

The data was visually represented using the Cartesian system. The visualization created an explanatory timeline of posting frequency, public response, comments, and sharing patterns by mapping the posting date, time, and critical metrics.

To complement the data-driven analysis, we incorporated linguistics insights using the SentimentAnalysis package (Proelochs and Feuerriegel, 2021) in R. This tool, which includes lexicons such as Harvard IV and other lexicons focused on financial jargon, conducted a sentiment analysis on the textual content of the posts. Significantly, our analysis was enhanced through utilising the NRC Emotion Lexicon and AFINN (Jockers, 2023). This lexicon correlates English words with a range of fundamental emotions and sentiments, allowing for a subtle comprehension of the emotional implication and overall direction of sentiments in government communications.

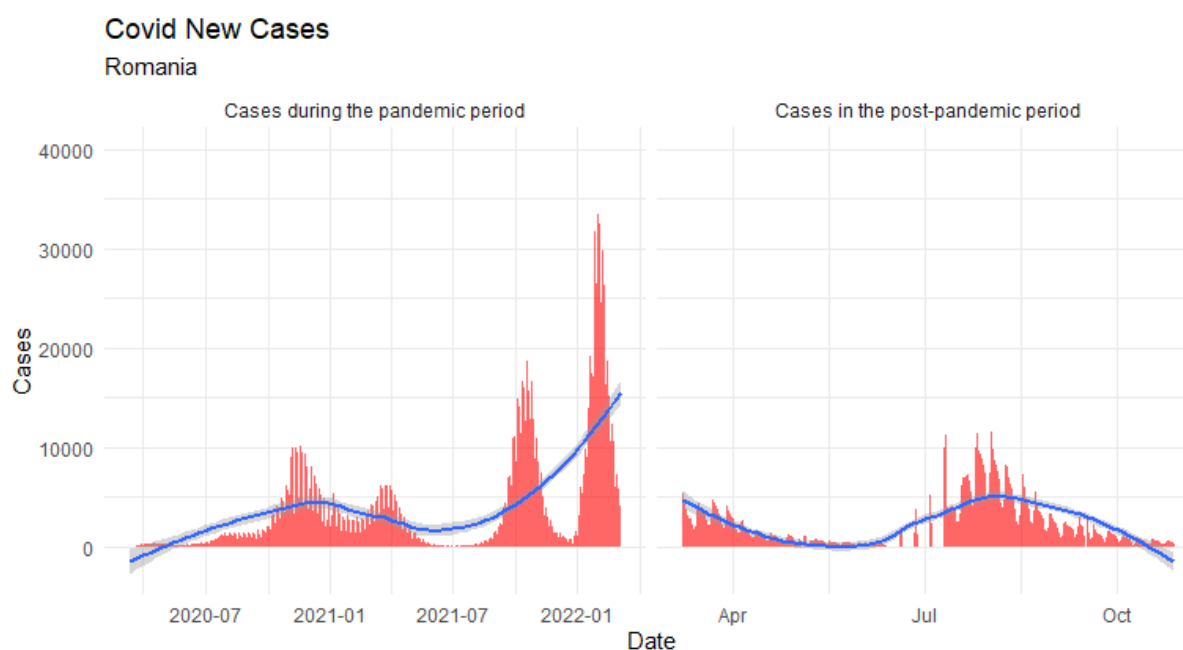
## **5. RESULTS**

### **5.1. Delineation of the Pandemic and Post-pandemic Periods**

During the designated pandemic period from 11th March 2020 to 7th March 2022 in Romania (Figure 1), epidemiological data show that there was an average of 3,812 newly reported cases per day. The median for this time frame is 1,550 new daily cases. The highest incidence in this period was an astonishing 40,018 cases in a single day. Looking at the quartile distribution, the first quartile (Q1) is at 361 new daily cases, while the third quartile (Q3) is recorded at 4,862 cases.

**Figure 1**

COVID-19 cases in Romania, during and after the pandemic period.



**Source:** Created by the authors.

In contrast, the subsequent post-pandemic period, between 8th March 2022 and 29th October 2022, records a relatively lower average of 2,188.9 new daily cases. The median for this period is 1,174 new daily cases. The highest recorded case incidence during this period was 14,943 cases in a single day. Regarding the quartile metrics, the first quartile (Q1) represents 436.5 daily new cases, while the third quartile (Q3) rises to 3,211.5.

Comparing these figures shows a clear decrease in daily case count during the post-pandemic phase as opposed to the pandemic era. This suggests a reduced infection rate. To be precise, the average daily case count during the pandemic era is nearly two times higher than the post-pandemic phase. Furthermore, the highest recorded daily cases during the pandemic were almost three times higher than the post-pandemic period, which reinforces the severity and spread of the infection during the former phase.

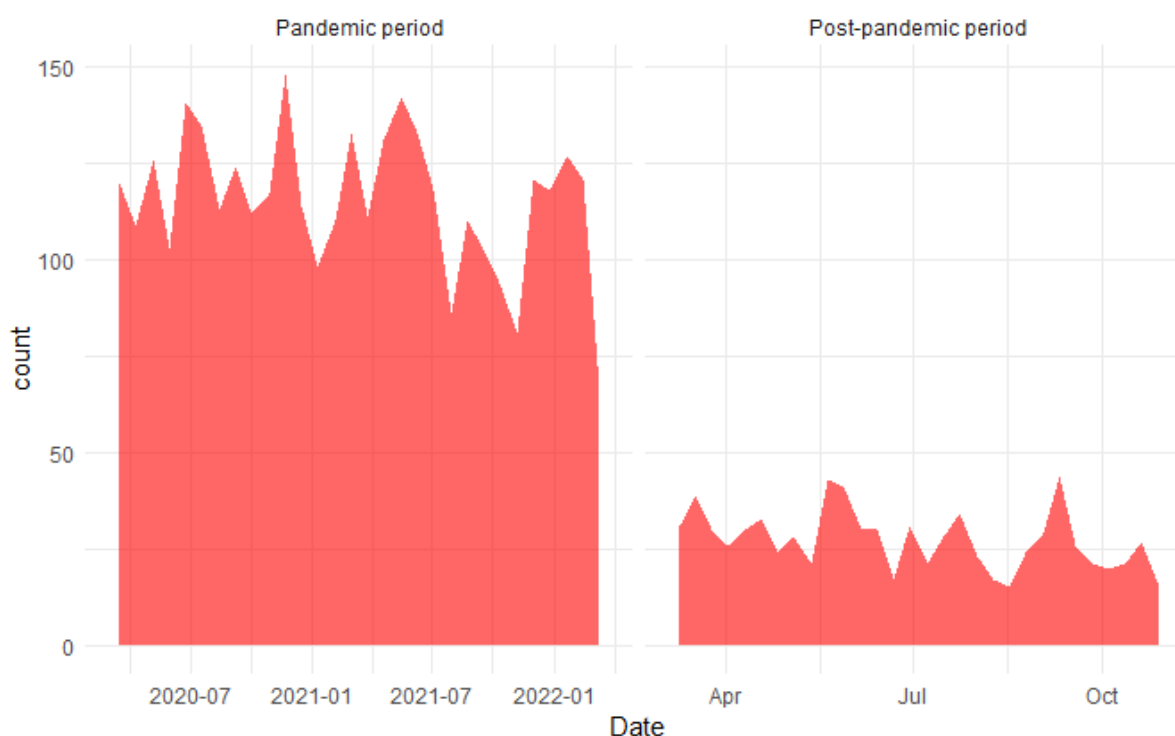
## 5.2. Analysis of Government Communication Frequency During the Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Periods

According to Figure 2, the Romanian government published a total of 1,466 Facebook posts related to COVID-19 from a total of 3,465 overall posts during the pandemic period. Hence, it can be inferred that 42.3% of the Romanian Government's online communication strategy during this period was centred on the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Figure 2**

*The progression of COVID-19 related Facebook posts, during and after the pandemic.*



**Source:** Created by the authors.

In contrast, the post-pandemic period saw a significant decrease in infection-related posts, with only 12 out of 819 posts, a meagre 1.46%. The above observation highlights that the Romanian Government's online communication strategy during the pandemic period was heavily focused on matters related to the coronavirus infection. The government's focus can be seen as a collaborative effort to inform and educate its citizens about the pandemic and the measures enforced by authorities to control the spread of the virus. The large number of articles about COVID-19 highlights the crucial importance that the executive branch placed on this topic.

The government faced major challenges during the pandemic, including movement restrictions and social distancing mandates, which inevitably impacted the daily lives of the population. Through their online communications, the government sought to provide relevant information, thereby creating a sense of trust and safety among the people. In parallel, the government aimed to organize and strengthen measures to fight the pandemic, with a particular emphasis on the importance of vaccination.

As the intensity of the pandemic reduced, and the national vaccination campaign was launched, there was a noticeable change in the government's online communication approach. Later, in the post-pandemic period, the number of COVID-19 related posts declined, indicating less emphasis on this issue. In contrast, a surge in posts addressing other vital subjects such as the economy, education, and infrastructure was observed.

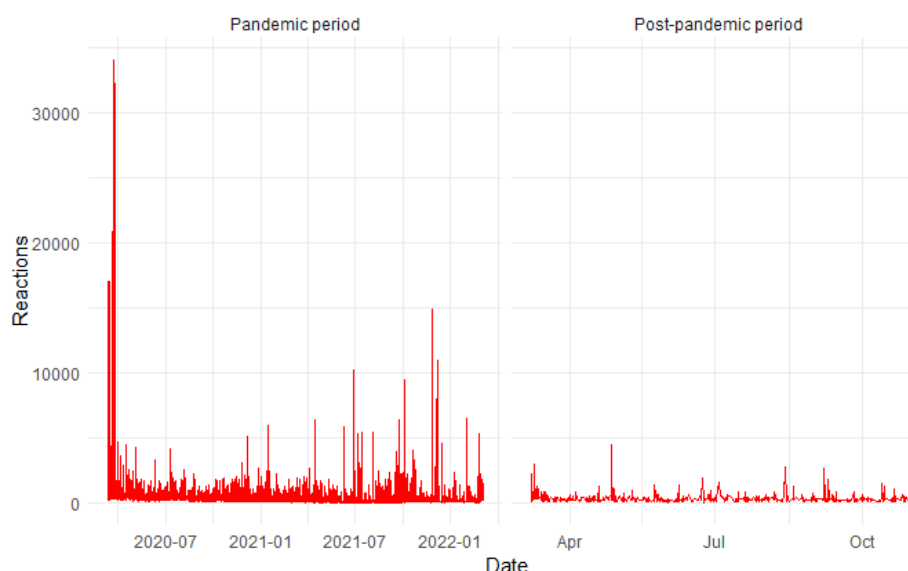
This change in communication strategy can be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand, it could imply that the government is confident in the vaccination campaign's effectiveness and believes that infection rates and virus transmission have been significantly reduced. On the other hand, it may indicate that the government is deliberately shifting attention to other pressing issues and current priorities.

### 5.3. Analysis of Public Reactions during Pandemic and Post-pandemic Phases

An analysis of online interactions during the pandemic period shows, according to Figure 3, that the posts made by the Romanian Government garnered an average of 561.7 reactions per post. The median number of reactions was 308. It is worth noting that the post with the highest engagement received 33,985 reactions, while the first quartile of posts had 119 reactions, and the third quartile saw 588 reactions each.

**Figure 3**

*The evolution of Facebook reactions during and after the pandemic.*



**Source:** Created by the authors.

When exploring the specific reaction types during this phase, we found that the 'Love' reaction had an average of 12.92, a median of 5, and peaked at 357 reactions for a single post. The 'Wow' reactions had an average of 27.01, with the median at 15, and the highest count at 906 reactions. The 'Sorry' reactions, although less common, had an average of 2, a median of 1, and a peak of 73 reactions. Anger reactions had an average of 5.92, a median of 2, and the post with the highest number of such reactions garnered 428 responses. Care reactions were more common, with an average of 60.83, a median of 27, and the most engaging post in this category receiving 3,328 responses. Interestingly, there were no 'Haha' reactions recorded during this period, indicating a distinct tone or sentiment in the public's response.

After the pandemic, the dynamics changed. The average number of reactions per post decreased to 297, with a median of 216. The post that received the most engagement during this period garnered 4,413 responses. Meanwhile, the reactions

for the lower and upper quartiles were 158 and 309.5 respectively.

Regarding the specific reaction types during this phase, the number of Love reactions declined, averaging 6.11, with a median of 3 and a maximum of 259 reactions. Wow reactions had an average of 24.96, with the median at 17, and the highest count was 443 for a specific post. Sorry reactions were relatively infrequent with an average of 1.62, a median of 1, and a maximum count of 27 reactions. In contrast, Anger reactions had an average of 2.394, with an unusual median of 0, but a peak count of 470 reactions for a single post. Finally, Care reactions had an average of 24.96, with the median at 17, and the highest count was 439 reactions for a specific post. Once more, the 'Haha' reactions were noticeably missing, affirming the previous claim that the public did not find the government's messages entertaining.

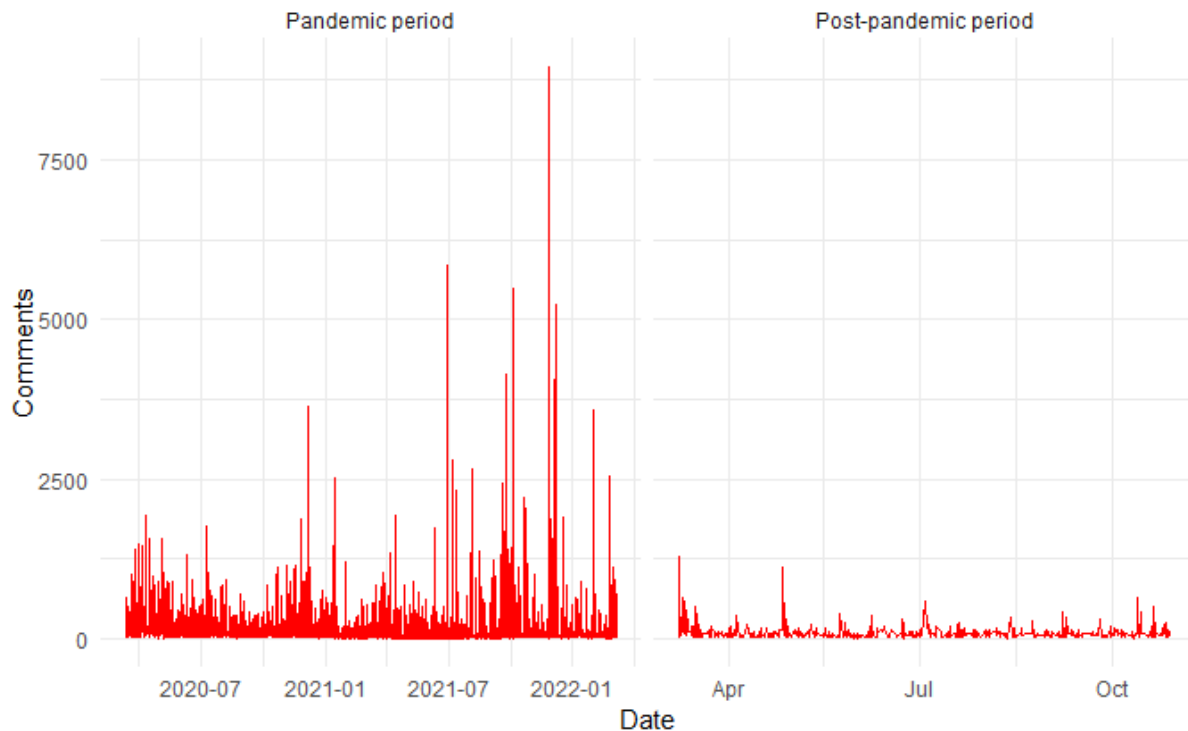
Overall, the data illustrates the noticeable changes in Facebook reactions to government posts from the pandemic to the post-pandemic phase. There is a clear decrease in average post engagement in the later period. However, the figures for reactions such as Love, Wow, and Care seem to be less impacted by the current situation. The continued lack of 'Haha' reactions during both periods may highlight the public's view of the government's posts as more serious, even sombre or disheartening. This shift in sentiment could be attributed to the public's changing concerns and areas of focus, with the government's communication becoming less central during the post-pandemic transition.

#### **5.4. An Examination of Public Comments During and After the Pandemic**

When scrutinizing online discourse, especially comments made during the pandemic period (Figure 4), an average of 167.2 comments per post were submitted. The median, which is another method of assessing central tendency, was 67 comments. Regarding distribution, the first quartile received 27 comments, and the third quartile amassed 168 comments. The post that garnered the most engagement during this phase received up to 8,947 comments.

**Figure 4**

*The evolution of Facebook comments during and after the pandemic.*



**Source:** Created by the authors.

Conversely, there was a decrease in engagement during the post-pandemic period. The average number of comments per post decreased to 77.74, with the median dropping to 52 comments. The distribution also changed, with the first quartile showing 33 comments now, and the third quartile seeing a decrease to 87 comments. During this period, the most commented post received 1,280 comments while the least engaging one got only 2 comments.

These statistics emphasise that, during the pandemic, the average number of comments per post was twice as high as after the pandemic period. The median number of comments per post also decreased from 67 during the pandemic to 52 in the post-pandemic period. Although the first quartile values increased slightly in the post-pandemic phase, the third quartile was significantly higher during the pandemic, almost double. At the same time, the post that received the highest number of comments experienced a sixfold decrease during the post-pandemic phase. This transition highlights a noticeable change in user behaviour in terms of their inclination to comment on posts after the pandemic.

By analysing this data, one can observe a significant difference in commenting behaviour before and after the pandemic's conclusion. The pre-pandemic average, which was 167.2 comments per post, implies a higher level of public engagement and participation. This increased interaction may possibly be due to the public's strong interest in the topic, a hypothesis reinforced by the significant contrast in the

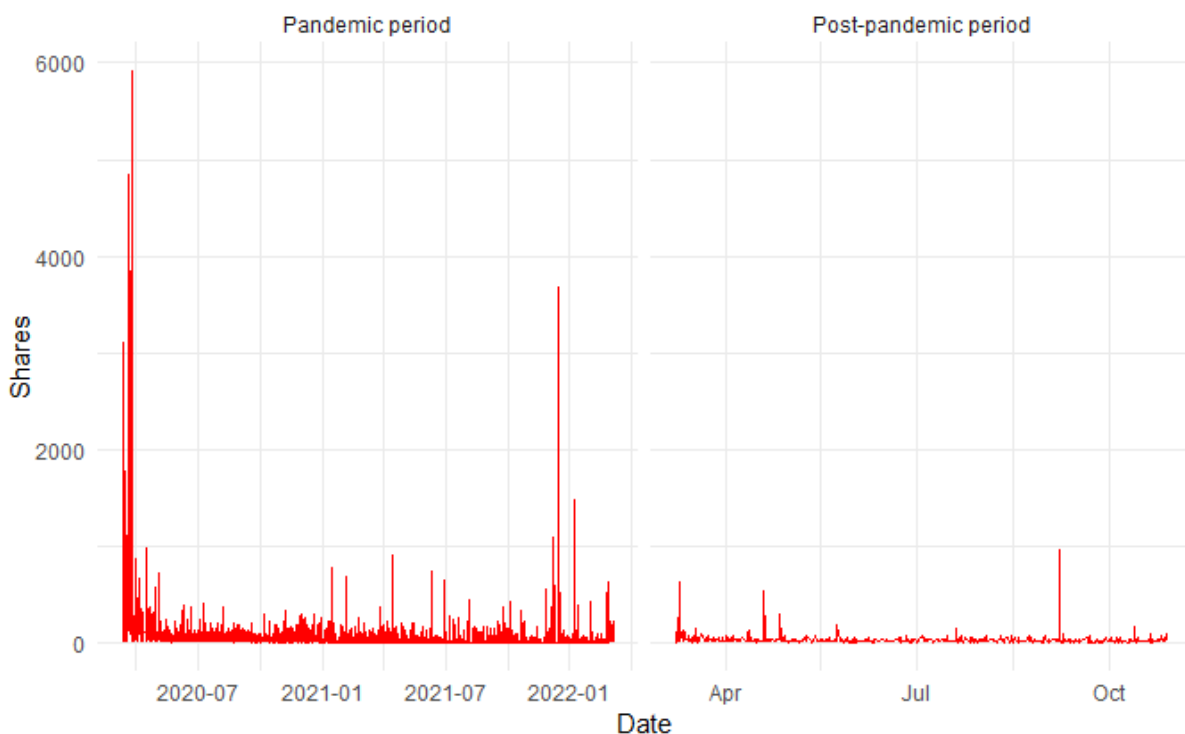
maximum number of comments: from a staggering 8,947 during the pandemic to a much lower 1,280 afterwards. This adjustment in online engagement patterns could yield significant insights into the changing interests and attention spans of the public over the two time periods.

### 5.5. Analysis of Social Group Dissemination during and after the Pandemic

Exploring COVID-19 themed post dissemination reveals a noticeable trend (Figure 5). At the height of the pandemic, posts obtained an average sharing rate of 63.84, while the median value was 22 shares. The lower quartile displayed 7 shares, in comparison to the upper quartile's notable 58 shares per post. Of significant note, the peak post dissemination during this time was recorded at 5,908 shares.

**Figure 5**

*The evolution of Facebook shares during and after the pandemic.*



**Source:** Created by the authors.

Moving into the post-pandemic era, there is a clear decrease in these values. The average number of post shares reduced to 27.26, while the median saw a slight decline to 18 shares. The quartile values also showed a shift: the first quartile represented 10 shares per post, whereas the third quartile was adjusted to a value of 29. In this subsequent period, the post with the most extensive reach scored 958 shares, a significant reduction from the prior period.

These statistics give an overall outlook on dissemination patterns in two separate periods. Clearly, during the pandemic, each post was shared more frequently than during the post-pandemic stage, as the average number of shares increased from

approximately 27 to 64. In addition, the median number of shares decreased from 22 to 18. The quartile values reveal that posts were shared more variably during the pandemic, covering a wider range of share numbers. However, the post-pandemic stage showed a more consistent pattern of sharing, with a narrower range of share numbers. The sharp reduction in the maximum number of shares for a post after the pandemic highlights that there could be a declining interest among users in the subject of COVID-19. This trend could indicate a change in the public's focus, which might be due to an overload of information or a societal shift towards more immediate concerns in the world after the pandemic.

### **5.6. The communication direction of the Romanian Government during the pandemic and post-pandemic period**

An analysis of communication trends during and after the pandemic era provides enlightening insights into the shifting priorities and concerns of a government. During the pandemic period, a clear emphasis was observed in the government's discussions on its official Facebook page. Prominently, the term "COVID-19", which refers to the illness caused by the coronavirus, was frequently used. Notably, the name of the then-Prime Minister "Ludovic Orban", along with the word "Coronavirus", dominated the communication narrative. Other terms that became prominent include "vaccination", "Florin Cîțu", and the expression "official news.ro".

Subsequently, following the pandemic, the narrative began to evolve. Communication increasingly mentioned the name of the Prime Minister, "Nicolae Ciucă", and the country "Ukraine". This was due to the onset of the Ukraine-Russia conflict in February 2022. At the same time, there was a greater emphasis on the phrase "European Development" and references to the "President", specifically alluding to President Klaus Werner Iohannis. An additional observation indicates a focus on terms such as "investments", "projects", and "measures". A crucial matter during the early months of 2022 was concerns about a possible shortage of "electricity" and "natural gas," mainly because of the aftermath of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. As a result, the acronym "NATO" also featured in Facebook posts.

The shift between these two distinct periods embodies the government's changing areas of focus. During the pandemic, the main emphasis was undeniably on COVID-19, with the government's communication strategy centered on measures to combat the pandemic, such as vaccinating people and updating the public about the current situation. In contrast, in the post-pandemic phase, the focus shifted to other issues such as European development, investments, projects and the energy crisis against the backdrop of the Ukrainian conflict. Moreover, there was a rise in the frequency of mentions of the Prime Minister's and President's names in Facebook posts. These changes in communication patterns provide insights into the government's adaptive policy changes and current concerns, reflecting its ability to respond to changing scenarios and needs.

**Table 1***The communication direction of the Romanian Government during the pandemic and post-pandemic period.*

Pandemic period		Post-pandemic period	
Keywords	Frequency	Keywords	Frequency
COVID-19	1557	Nicolae Ciuca	747
Ludovic Orban	913	Ukraine	176
Coronavirus	888	European development	118
The situation	795	President	117
strategist	719	investment	108
Please	718	measures	102
Vaccination	451	Energy	99
Florin Cițu	420	project	94
Update	409	NATO	89
Stirioficiale.ro	389	GAS	81

**Source:** Created by the authors.

### 5.7. Analysis of online discourse sentiment indicators during the pandemic and post-pandemic period

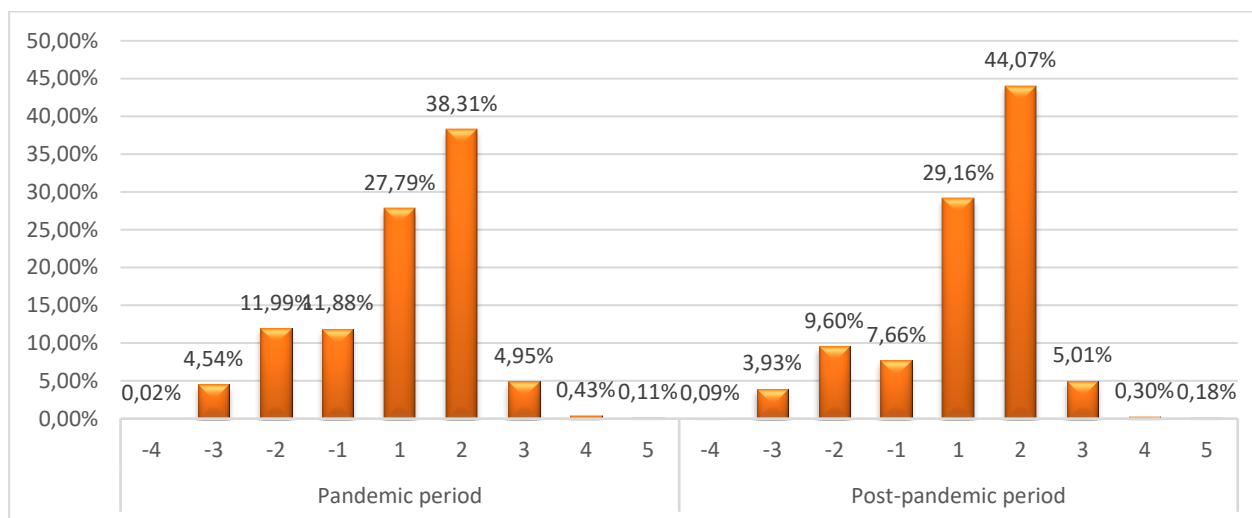
Examining sentiment indicators in online discourse during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods provides valuable insights into the evolving communication strategies of the Romanian Government.

The analysis of the Romanian Government's public discourse during the pandemic, using the AFINN method, provides a clear insight into its communication preferences. 71.58% of the sentiment scores during the pandemic correlated with positive words, which fall between +1 and +5. By contrast, 28.42% of the words, that scored between -1 and -3, had a negative sentiment. As the situation moved into the post-pandemic phase, there was a clear shift. The percentage of positive discourse increased to 78.71%, while negative content decreased to 21.29%.

This change in communication signifies the strategic approach adopted by the government. To promote hope and confidence among the public, the government aimed to emphasize positive language while reducing negative terms. The government's choice suggests an effort to manage public perception and sentiment during challenging times, emphasizing optimism and minimizing potential concerns.

**Figure 6**

*Sentiment analysis of online discourse using the AFINN method, in the pandemic and post-pandemic period.*

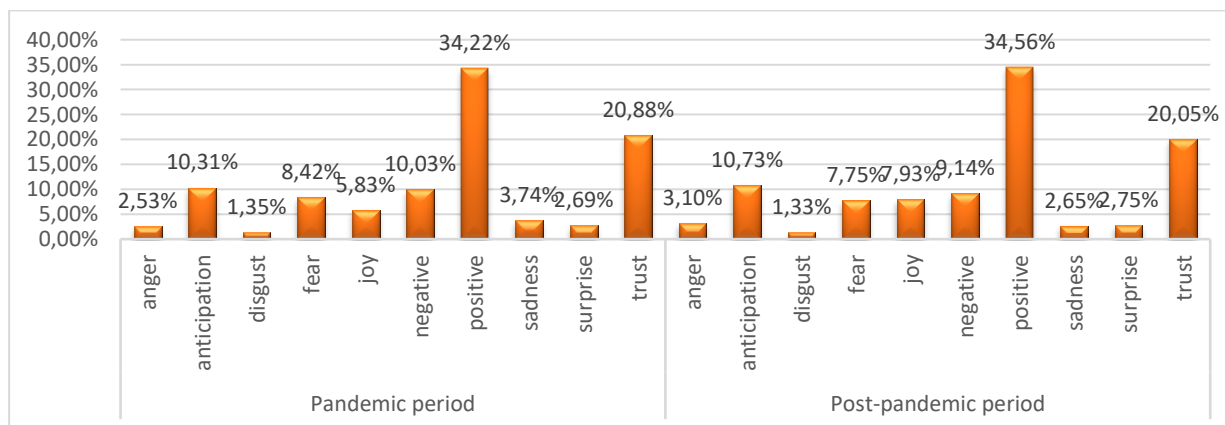


**Source:** Created by the authors.

An in-depth discourse analysis using the NRC method revealed that during the pandemic, the Romanian Government's Facebook communication created a positive experience for 34.22% of its audience. In contrast, only 10.03% had a negative connotation. Emotionally, the conversation emphasised words that evoke trust (20.88%) and anticipation (10.31%), followed by words associated with fear (8.42%), joy (5.83%), sadness (3.74%), surprise (2.69%), anger (2.53%), and disgust (1.35%). In contrast, during the post-pandemic phase, there was a consistent emphasis and a 34.56% focus on positivity, combined with a minor reduction in negative sentiment to 9.14%. Emotionally, the messages conveyed primarily trust (20.05%) and anticipation (10.73%), accompanied by joy (7.93%), fear (7.75%), anger (3.10%), surprise (2.75%), sadness (2.65%), and disgust (1.33%).

**Figure 7**

*Sentiment analysis of online discourse using the NRC method, in the pandemic and post-pandemic period.*



**Source:** Created by the authors.



In broad terms, the Facebook discourse by the Romanian Government highlights positive emotions, especially trust and anticipation. The reason for this approach is the government's efforts to promote a sense of security and optimism among the public, specifically in dealing with pandemic-related concerns and similar events. This communication strategy could influence people to follow preventative measures against the virus and stay updated with official information. Concurrently, by means of messages distributed on the Facebook platform, the executive branch assures the public of its capability of adeptly managing the situation, even when it is unpredictable. This methodological approach aims to strengthen public trust and enhance citizen support for governmental policies and decisions.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant global ramifications, affecting not only the healthcare system but also government strategies for public communication. Our observational analysis aimed to understand the Romanian government's online communication, mainly on Facebook, throughout and after the pandemic. The results provide a comprehensive overview of the government's adaptive strategies and public engagement.

The distinction between the pandemic and post-pandemic periods in Romania is clear, based on the significant decline in daily COVID-19 cases after March 7, 2022. This periodization enables us to examine the shifts and evolutions in the Romanian government's communication strategies and public reactions.

It is evident that during the pandemic, the Romanian government prioritized COVID-19 in its online communication. As much as 42.3% of the total Facebook posts were dedicated to the pandemic situation. This suggests that the government acknowledged the critical need for frequent updates and awareness campaigns that conform to international health communication guidelines during emergencies. However, after the pandemic, the number of COVID-19 related posts fell sharply to only 1.46% of the total posts. One possible explanation for this significant decline could be the diminished daily infection rates and the government's refocusing of its attention to recovery, rebuilding, and other crucial matters, including the economy and education.

The public's engagement with government posts underwent a transformation as well. During the pandemic, the high average number of reactions and comments on posts indicates a concerned and involved citizenry actively seeking information and clarity from official sources. Notably, the prevailing sentiments - 'Care' and 'Love' - suggest a nation coming together, expressing support and unity during challenging times. However, the engagement witnessed a decline during the post-pandemic phase. Despite the persistence of the public's serious approach, the reduced reactions imply possible information fatigue or a change in public priorities.

The decrease in the average number of comments and shares highlights the decline in public interest and engagement during the post-pandemic phase. It is possible that public discourse shifted towards other important national and international issues,

reducing the motivation to actively engage with pandemic-related content as the immediacy of the pandemic threat declined.

A significant change in the government's communication direction was noted during the post-pandemic period. Although COVID-19-related terms dominated the pandemic narrative, post-pandemic communication has expanded to cover a wider range of topics. Remarkably, the Romanian government turned its attention to geopolitical matters, especially the Ukraine-Russia conflict, European advancements, and energy issues. This demonstrates the adaptability of government communication in addressing relevant issues of the age.

Moreover, sentiment analysis using AFINN and NRC revealed emotional aspects of the government's online communication. Enhanced optimism in the aftermath of the pandemic suggests that the government aims to promote hope and trust among the citizens, directing its focus towards recovery and the future. The constant effort to uphold public positivity, even at the peak of the pandemic, underscores the government's dedication to boosting public morale.

In conclusion, our observational analysis provides a profound understanding of the Romanian government's dynamic communication strategy in response to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability to adapt their online discourse, the changes in public involvement, and the emphasis on building trust and positivity in both periods are praiseworthy. The study emphasizes the crucial role of effective governmental communication in managing public sentiment during crises, shaping narratives, and leading the nation towards recovery. Future research could investigate additional digital platforms and the impact of offline communication strategies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the government's complete communication system during these unprecedented times.

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